

# MURAL PAINTINGS

OF THE

## BOMBAY SCHOOL

By

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BOMBAY  
THE TIMES OF INDIA PRESS  
1930

TO

H. E. THE RIGHT HON'BLE SIR FREDERICK HUGH SYKES,

P.C., G.C.I.E., G.B.E., K.C.B., C.M.G.

GOVERNOR OF BOMBAY

WHOSE PERSONAL SYMPATHY AND AID HAS ENABLED  
THESE REPRODUCTIONS OF THE MURAL PAINTINGS  
OF INDIAN STUDENTS TO BE LAID BEFORE THE  
PUBLIC, THIS SLIGHT RECORD OF AN ARTISTIC  
EFFORT WHICH IN ALL ITS STAGES HAS OWED SO  
MUCH TO THE INSPIRING PERSONAL SUPPORT OF  
THE GOVERNOR IS INSCRIBED WITH DEEP  
RESPECT AND GRATITUDE.

## PREFACE

MR GLADSTONE SOLOMON, the Director of the Bombay School of Art, has kindly consented to write the following pages on the subject of the mural paintings of the Bombay School of Art. As the master whose guiding and controlling hand has been indispensable to the mural decorations of New Delhi, there could be no one better fitted than he for the task.

The object of the book is to give a short review, pictorial and descriptive, of the *Mural Paintings by the students of an Indian Art School*—that of Bombay—and to accompany the reproductions of the works by a brief account of the system of teaching which has led to these results. Attention has also been drawn to various features which appear to be of particular importance in the work of Indian students and their more interesting characteristics, such as the inherent love of and capacity for decorative drawing which indeed has been a religious ordinance ever since Vedic times when every separate sacrifice had its own scheme of decorative drawing to accompany it.

In Part I, the story of the School's work has been carried as far as the completion of the Mural Paintings commissioned for New Delhi by the Government of India. It was, however, clear that something more was required to explain the object of this effort. Otherwise there was danger lest the reader might regard the decorations at New Delhi by Indian students of the Bombay School of Art as an isolated effort instead of as a logical development of a most useful and deeply rooted national talent which has once again been brought to fruition by recent facilities for advanced training in drawing and painting to students in India. Part II therefore forms a brief study of *Indian decorative influences in the past and gives a slight sketch of their effect to-day in Bombay*.

Needless to say this book can do no more than touch, as it were, the fringe of a vast subject, but it indicates how wide is the Indian student's decorative view of life, that this is by no means confined to his studies in the Art School and that he still lives in an atmosphere of decorative art which is, of course, the secret of his receptivity and remarkable executive and creative capacities.

Mr Solomon's acknowledgments are due to the editors of "Islamic Culture," "The Review of Nations," "The Times of India", and "The

Bombay Chronicle" for his articles "The Moghul Message of Beauty," "The Indian Art Renaissance," "Drawing the Rangoli at Diwali", and "Scenes at a Hindu Wedding in Bombay" respectively, reprinted from these journals in part or in their entirety in this work. He is also deeply indebted for their support, sympathy and encouragement to that wide circle of friends who have so cordially assisted the School of Art in its studies and struggles for the opportunity which has arisen at New Delhi, and without whom little could have been accomplished.

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## INTRODUCTION

IN 1872 Mr John Griffiths, Principal of the Bombay School of Art, undertook the supervision of the work of making copies of the Mural Paintings in the Ajanta Caves, which had been executed by Buddhist painters during the first six centuries. The Government of India sanctioned an annual grant for this purpose, and a number of students from the Bombay School of Art were engaged for the task. The work was continued until 1881 at a total cost of more than Rs 50,000.

The result of this effort on the part of the Bombay students was to give to the public the first pictorial record of what Indian artists had once produced in the realms of Mural Decoration. Unfortunately most of these copies were lost. "The copies, many of them of very large dimensions, were forwarded to the Secretary of State for India and placed in the Indian Museum at South Kensington. This was against my wish," writes Mr Griffiths, "as I was of opinion that they would be safer in the School of Art in Bombay, but I proposed that if they were sent, duplicate copies should be made. I was overruled in both propositions, though if they had been followed we should not have to regret the loss, a second time, of the greater number of copies by fire and through carelessness."

Mr Griffiths has included a very significant comment in his book "The Paintings in the Buddhist Cave Temples of Ajanta" based upon this pioneer effort of modern Indian art students. He writes, "The most curious and interesting phase of my Indian experience was the initiation of Hindu, Parsi and Goanese students in the mysteries of an art still congenial to the Oriental temperament and hand. I am persuaded that no European, no matter how skilful, could have so completely caught the spirit of the originals. It is conceivable that if these young men were entrusted with the execution of original work on a large scale they might have carried forward the decorative traditions of Ajanta to an issue of considerable interest." This expression of opinion on the part of one so well qualified to speak sounds in the reader's ear like an echo of a sigh of regret.

In recent years, the students of the Bombay School of Art, more fortunate than their predecessors, have been employed upon many original works of mural decoration, and the reproductions in this volume will show how they acquitted themselves of the task of decorating with paintings a

portion of the public buildings of New Delhi with which the Government of India entrusted them

The publication of these reproductions of the students' work will, it is hoped, serve a double purpose. It will convey in a form readily accessible to artists, students, and lovers of art a record of the capacities and methods of work of the students of the largest and oldest Art School in India, and it should serve no less as a useful corrective against inaccurate information which is circulated in Europe and elsewhere in regard to art and art education in India at the present time.

The writer was much impressed by the great interest displayed by visitors to the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley in the work of Indian art students. Many admirers of Indian Art may have read or heard of the criticisms which have been levelled at Indian Art during recent years, but it is hoped that these criticisms have been withdrawn now that the work of the Indian art students has been shown to be of no mean order. A certain amount of criticism was aroused in India by the request of the School to be allowed to participate with others in the mural decorations of the Imperial Secretariats at New Delhi. It is most gratifying however to know that their request did not fall on deaf ears and that they have been commissioned to decorate one of the Committee rooms.

The reader is asked to try to visualise for himself what New Delhi is really like. If he will revive his recollections of the Louvre, the Vatican, St. Peter's, five or six of the biggest London hospitals, Cologne Cathedral, the Uffizi Gallery, and the Doge's Palace in Venice, and roll all these into one and spread the combined edifices over a spacious area, he will get some faint idea of the immensity of New Delhi! It would take two hundred artists a century to decorate with paintings the Imperial Secretariats alone to say nothing of the rest of the buildings, even if they worked as expeditiously as did Michael Angelo in the Sistine Chapel. The vastness of the Secretariat buildings is very feelingly realised by visitors who find endless colonnades, corridors, courts, and stair cases, which are a veritable maze to the stranger. It is said indeed that the Imperial Secretariats contain six miles of walking space. There are artists of Bombay and students of other schools who are also decorating New Delhi, but it is pleasing to know that the work of the students of the Bombay School of Art in Committee Room "A" will be handed down to posterity as an example of the high standard of teaching in drawing and painting in the Bombay Schools.



## PART I

### I SOME ASPECTS OF MURAL PAINTING IN INDIA

THE decoration of wall spaces which occupied the attention and exemplified the skill of our remote ancestors, the pre historic people of very many thousands of years ago,—as the caverns of France and Spain still bear witness\*—has in our own time again become a subject of particular attention.

This renewal of interest in decorative art is highly significant to those who live in India, where mural painting had been cultivated to the degree of excellence (as we have extant testimony to show in the Ajantâ Caves) some two thousand years ago, and in a very special sense, it has interested Bombay which has every right to consider itself as a pioneer of the revival in India of this beautiful branch of the painter's art. Not only was Bombay the first city in India to send art students to study and copy the wall paintings of the Ajantâ Caves, but it was also the first to establish a special class for mural painting in its School of Art, which was largely due to the taste and patronage of the then Governor of Bombay, Lord Lloyd, with the full support of public opinion.

Mural painting as a branch of art must be regarded from a different standpoint to the easel picture, for it has an entirely different objective, and the artist, if he is to practise his art successfully, must co-ordinate his work with the architectural features and limitations of the building. This is not to say that the painter should be controlled by the architect. The ideal to be aimed at is "the good old rule, the simple plan" of co-operation of the three arts in all decorative work, and this is a tradition still firmly rooted in India though in many places now a days, there are too many water tight compartments in art. The unnatural separation of Painting, Sculpture, and Architecture has not been followed by the exaltation of any of the three. Like everything else, mural painting is exposed to criticism, however good it may be. Correggio's mural paintings are often sharply criticised by architects, and certainly his methods were very different from those of Pinturricchio, whose decorations are generally admired by architectural authorities. Yet they too were severely judged by an architect and painter of his own time, Giorgio Vasari. The truth is that the value of a work of art is not assessed by the artist himself or his critics, but is established or demolished

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\* La Caverne d Altamira. Emile Cartailhac et l abbe Henri Breuil, 1906

by the verdict of posterity—a tribunal from whose decision there is no appeal, and which has canonised (metaphorically speaking) both Correggio and Pinturricchio. It is true that Correggio foreshortened his figures on the dome of Parma Cathedral to an amazing extent, and that Pinturricchio painted the Borgia apartments of the Vatican as though his figures were not over the head of the spectator, but on the same level, and whatever the critics may say, one has only to stand beneath these vaultings, to realise, that *both* artists obtained magnificent results. The present is an age of Theory in Art, we hear the law freely laid down that walls must be painted in some particular style especially is this the case in regard to India, but as to which style, there are almost as many opinions as there are artists! It is safe to admit, however, that buildings can be admirably decorated, whether in India or anywhere else, in innumerable ways, however one may personally lean towards one or the other method. After all, theories and discussions will not decorate a wall surface. The "Old Masters" of mural painting obtained results, and their walls and domes blazed with beauty, we modern folk may talk about and appraise artistic values, may riddle established reputations with new fangled weapons of so called criticism, but the walls of our buildings glare upon us still in all their nudity, for we have forgotten to clothe them with the painter's garment of colour "the drapery which is their due", when we really set the artists to work once again in India, we shall have something to talk about. In the Pantheon in Paris, one can study the different methods of mural painting of Puvis de Chavannes, Laurens, Bonat, Maillot, Cabanel, and a great many others—all cheek by jowl so to speak in the same building. What a medley! It is easy to pick faults in this or that artist's work or to make scathing comparisons. And yet—how interesting it all is! Only the other day I had an opportunity of visiting once again the mural decorations still existing and restored in Agra, and was again struck by the simplicity of the Moghul methods, which were primitive in plan, and very satisfying. The Moghuls abhorred a bald wall surface—which is not simplicity, but mere barrenness—as Nature abhors a vacuum. Their paintings like their decorations of wall spaces with inlaid semi precious stones, seem designed to bring their gardens into their buildings. Their palaces were painted or decorated all over, just as the Indian Bhuddist temples and sculptures were painted throughout, for master builders of all ages have included *colour* as an essential part of their plan.

India is the colour box of the world. The vivid hues of skies and lakes, the brilliant flowering trees, the gorgeous flora, the kaleidoscopic bazaars, impress themselves so richly upon the tapestry of one's mind that

the word 'India' and the term 'colour' have become synonymous to us. It seems a pity that the colour of India should be kept behind closed doors, if the doors be thrown wide open to admit the artists, India's colour will adorn her buildings, as it does our minds.

There arises the question of the medium which should be employed in decorating Indian walls, whether it should be Fresco, Tempera, or Oil Painting. It may well be all of these, for all are suitable to specific problems, though all are not equally suitable to all problems, each has its own advantages, whether of hue, durability, or facility of execution. Oil on canvas, the popular decorative medium of Europe, is an admirable method of mural painting when *marouflé* on a wall panel of set dimensions, but it is not the best medium to paint long spaces with continuity of design, and it is expensive. Fresco may crack, unless the preparation of the walls, the colours, the *intonaco*, are irreproachable, Tempera may be too hard and sharp to convey the "atmosphere" which the artist has in his mind, and various mediums may be affected by various climates. The mural painter should adjust his plan of painting to the particular problem he has to solve. Personally, I think it would be a pity if only one medium were universally employed for mural painting in India, or anywhere else, as this would entail needless limitations. My experience of Western India in particular has given me full confidence in the durability of the oil-on-canvas medium, and also of Fresco (properly understood) in Bombay, and I am not afraid that the white ants and the climate will conspire together to stop the Indian revival of mural painting. The future fate of this revival lies not wholly with the Indian artists or their patrons, but with those who guarantee the damp resisting and fissure proof qualities of walls, domes, and surfaces in India.

After the question of the medium to be used has been settled, comes the consideration of what type of treatment is the best for mural painting. Should the artist admit light and shade? Should he paint doorways and windows with distant views of gardens, skies, and fountains? Should he transform the surface of the walls that imprison him, and create an illusion of space and freedom, by the skill of his brush?

On the other hand, should the mural painter adopt a "geometrical" method of painting such as is seen in the Ajanta Caves in its fullest flower? Should he make his figures flat, and place them on the same plane as himself—even if they are in a position high above his head?

The solution of these problems may, and often does depend, not upon the taste and style of the artist himself, but upon the type of work which

the artist's employer or patron desires Just as an architect who has specialised in the Byzantine style, may be commissioned to build something after the Queen Anne pattern, whatever his own predilection may be, so a painter celebrated for his "Indian" style of painting, may, now-a-days, have to bring his dual art into play and to paint with all the perspective and rotundity of form of (so-called) "Western" Art

With regard to Fresco painting, it is interesting to note that even enthusiasts, over this time-honoured medium, admitted many years ago that it has its drawbacks Mr Hamilton Jackson says "At a meeting of the Society of Arts, on February 12th, 1864, when the subject under discussion was the best method of painting to employ in mural decoration, at which a Paper was read by J B Atkinson, highly extolling Fresco, Lord Elcho, who was in the chair, quoting J R Herbert, R A, said that if the plasterer on one day put more water into his plaster than he did on another, the colour would come out different, though the same colours had been employed In the fresco of 'Lear and Cordelia' he had cut out the head of Lear six times, and that of Cordelia, five times, and there was no part of that picture which had not been cut out four times Mr Dyce's and Mr Herbert's plasterers both died mad, in Mr Herbert's opinion, owing to constant worry" (I have personally found from frequent practice with this medium—that in a climate like Bombay, it is more difficult to manage, than oil on canvas) The same authority goes on to warn artists of the danger to health of commencing work before the plaster is dry in a confined space, or one sheltered from wind, and the risks of the scaffolding, etc From all of which one may deduce some good reasons for the fact that while one hears Fresco much praised as the medium for mural decoration, one sees comparatively little of it done nowadays The oil on-canvas medium is frequently objected to by critics, and yet is very generally used There must therefore be a good deal to be said in favour of this method of wall decoration The fact that the artist is enabled to paint his decoration for a public building in his own studio, carries great weight, and this advantage would certainly go far to counterbalance the undoubted objection that a mural panel painted in the artist's studio, may look very different when affixed to the dome for which it is intended

The practical advantages of the oil medium are far too great to be discarded without exceedingly careful consideration of the alternative difficulties both of Fresco and Tempera, in a particular case But in spite of all difficulties in the way of mural painting in India, when one contrasts the prospects of this art to day, with what they were only ten years ago, we have many good reasons to feel hopeful This progress of mural painting

is largely due to the open and encouraging attitude of the people of Bombay towards this revival of a talent which is essentially Indian—the talent of filling spaces, decoratively. The inherent capacity of the Indian for decorative painting was an artistic revelation to me on my arrival in this country, and after many years of close personal study of this national talent, in which I have been assisted by numerous Indian friends, I am more than ever astounded at its surprising excellence, no less than by the fact that so little use has been made of all this wealth of artistic ability. But while the Indian craftsman struggles vainly for patronage, why should we be unduly surprised that the present measure of success that has now been met with in pioneer efforts to revive the craftsman's sister art—mural decoration—has only been gained after a long and bitter struggle? Shall we ever see a successful attempt to rescue the surviving Indian Art Crafts—before it is too late?

## II ART EDUCATION IN INDIA

AN experience of twelve years in India has convinced the present writer of the great advantages which the practical aspects of Indian Art possess over the study of the same problem, from the merely theoretical point of view. No artist is likely to be in any way surprised by this statement, but as Indian Art, with its branches in the Arts and Crafts, has interested, and continues to interest a great many people who do not live in India, and therefore cannot study the subject on the spot, some observations at first hand will probably lead the reader to a better understanding of this book. The student of Oriental Art may review its ancient phases in the British Museum or the *Musée Guimet*, and in numerous books on the subject, for there is no dearth nowadays of descriptions of India's splendid national monuments of Art, and no lack of lamentations on the part of many writers, at the comparative paucity of artistic production of a high level in India at the present time. The contrasts between the palmy periods of Buddhist, Brahmanical, or Moghul Art, and the present greatly reduced situation of the Fine and Applied Arts in India, are too trite to have escaped the notice of the most casual observers, whether inside or outside this great country. But those who are acquainted with the artistic capacities of Indian students, must regret that something more is not known of this—the "optimistic" aspect of the case as it may be termed—while the pessimistic view of past and present conditions is made so widely available to the public. When considering the sad depreciation of India's great patrimony of Art, one ought also to reckon up India's still-existing artistic assets, which though very considerable, are too often overlooked, because these modern resources are not so visible to the eye as the noble monuments which testify to the ancient wealth of Indian talent. The object of this book is to show something at least of India's present assets in Art through the study of the students' own handiwork.

Art students represent for us links between the past and the present, in these pages the strength of these links may be partly estimated not by theoretical tests, but by the practical test of the productions themselves. Everyone, who is conscious of the importance of the Oriental factor in Art, will find, in a study of the work of Indian students, features for real encouragement and hope.

It would be very difficult, if not impossible, for those who know India, the atmosphere of which is so intensely artistic, to believe that the

country has lost the capacity of projecting this all pervading impression (which is forced upon one in a thousand ways, and through a thousand different channels) through the tangible mediums of painting, sculpture, and architecture. An eminent statesman once remarked to me, when discussing some of the more pessimistic opinions in regard to these matters, "India is a country which one *feels* ought to produce artists"—a statement which conveys a very profound truth. It has been said that "one half of the world does not know how the other half lives,"—it has been my good fortune to acquaint myself personally with much of the evidence which goes to show that India is still an art producing country, that talent is inherent in the people, that genius still imbues the touch of the craftsman artist.

In the earlier stages of my experience as Principal of the Bombay School of Art, our main difficulty was to make the sceptics, long accustomed to view Indian Art in retrospective fashion, believe in this capacity of the students. The old erroneous notions, that Indian Artists can only see form in the flat, not in the round, that they are devoid of a sense of chiaroscuro, that they are merely imitative and not creative, are dying very rapidly. But there exists another still more difficult class of critics, these profess to see in these supposed deficiencies the true *metier* of Indian Art, in fact they glory in these deficiencies, and try to elevate the *limitations* of certain old conventions in Indian Art, into its greatest triumphs. These are the people who talk so despondently and openly of "Western Influence," etc, and though one does not hear them bestow a word of disapproval on the most up to-date innovations in India, such as railways, motors, American films, posters, pictures, photographs, and a host of other over sea importations, will have it that Indian Art in this Twentieth Century ought to maintain the trappings and conventions of the Fifth Century—or at latest, those of the Seventeenth! According to them, all that does not obviously derive from the archaic type, is *not* Indian Art.

These are the ideas which we have found to be most inimical to any progress in art in India. The people who profess to foresee deadly danger in progressive discoveries in art such as drawing a life size figure accurately from life, who predict ruin in the acquisition of mastery of new mediums in Indian Art such as Oil painting, cannot admire a picture by an Indian artist if it looks like work painted in their own time, though they do not object to the Indian artist wearing boots! It is only fair to the great mass of Indian opinion, to say that I have met very few Indians who themselves give utterance to views so sterilising to true progress.

As one who has to submit his theories to the practical proof of teaching, and who must expect his own views to be judged by the touch-stone of the productions of the students in his charge, I would rather see a student stumbling along in the wake of some good Western tradition, than one who is content perpetually to dish up the empty husks of old formulas of Indian design. There is hope of salvation for the one who is at least exploring a new field, but very little for the other, who is simply exploiting an exhausted one.

Many years of experience of an Art School in India \* has shown me conclusively, that it is impossible to restrict any considerable body of students to any one "style" of painting, for the following reasons —

- (1) Not every clever Indian student by any means can paint in the "Indian Style" as it is called
- (2) Many students can paint in the "Indian Style" but do not wish to do so
- (3) Many students utilize both styles separately, i.e., they may design and paint a mural panel in Water colour, Tempera, Fresco, or Oil, in "Indian Style" and may next accept a commission to paint a realistic portrait from life in "Western Style". They may do both very well, and for both they may receive payment.

The artist, no less than the architect, is dependent upon his patron, and not every patron of art in India wants the "Indian Style" of work. This is an awkward difficulty for those who clamour to see the old Indian methods of painting universally enforced. Consequently an Indian Art School if it is to teach art at all, must take a broad, rather than a narrow view of this problem, and allow the student to progress along those lines in art most suited to his genius. In spite of all arguments, academic, mystical, or philosophical, to prove that Indians *ought* to paint like this or that, Art cannot be self supporting, but must rely upon the patronage of the public. In blunt words, this question is not really one of theoretical criticism at all, but is very largely one of supply and demand.

Apart from the difficulty already mentioned, that there are many Indian students who either cannot or do not wish to paint in the style known, as "Indian", there is the troublesome fact that a very great many people will not buy these "Indian" pictures, because they buy portraits, or landscapes,

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\* Bombay has of course those cosmopolitan elements which are usually found in a Port which is in contact with Western countries — however distant.



or Indian street scenes, in methods of painting popularised in the West. Of course no good Indian Art School would wish to avoid encouraging the Indian traditional methods of design, colour, and decoration, because these are part and parcel of the students themselves, and will naturally keep in touch as much as possible, with the Ajanta Caves and the Ellora Caves, on the one hand, and the best Moghul influences on the other.

The Renaissance of Indian Art is no myth, but its apotheosis will not be hastened by doctrinaire systems of Art Education. Encouragement is the real means of solving the complex problems of Indian Art to day, and the sooner this fact is grasped and admitted by all who are interested in India, the sooner will Indian Art be enabled to flourish once more.

Let us consider the prospects which face the really clever Indian student on completing his courses of study. There is no Royal Academy,—no Salon in India. There are no Royal Art Societies, or any Societies exclusively guided by professional artists for the purpose of giving publicity to their work. The young Indian artist may exhibit once a year at certain open exhibitions for pictures (if he can afford to send them so far) at Simla, Bombay, Poona, Calcutta, Madras and a few other centres. But apart from the chances of publicity for his work afforded by the distant Art Exhibitions, there exist very few opportunities for an artist. He may get a humble post as a drawing master and paint in his spare time\*. Or he may take up some non artistic commercial job, and paint when he can. Or he may open a small School, or get a post with some patron (a Prince perhaps) who may keep him busy painting from photographs, or he may be lucky enough to get a berth as teacher in one of the very few official Art Schools. The "Eminent Artist" who is so familiar a figure to readers of the European newspapers, is almost unknown in India, but that is not because he does not exist. The sad fact is that the collapse of the princely Art Patron has had results in India far more dire, than followed his practical extinction in Europe, where Art has adjusted itself in some sort to this irreparable loss, by all kinds of substitutes, and has, partially at least, replaced the unrivalled patronage of the individual by that of the State.

Such being the position of affairs, it is not to be wondered at that the Indian Art Schools are usually devoid of classes for the study of drawing and painting from life in its advanced phases, or that the Class of Mural Painting in the Bombay School of Art and the organised Life Classes are the only classes of their kind in India. *But those who may be disposed to account*

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\* Almost all the artists in the Bombay Presidency are or have been drawing teachers.

for the disorganisation of art in India, by supposing that the people have forgotten art, would be in error. There is ample evidence to the contrary. It is possible to arrive at some interesting conclusions in this matter from an examination of the work of Indian students of mural painting.

### III INDIAN STUDENTS AND THE DECORATION OF NEW DELHI

THE history of the Class of Mural Painting of the Bombay School of Art is comprised within the last ten years. The sequence of work in this class, as may be expected, has been progressive, and the standards have been steadily rising. This is particularly noticeable in the development of line which is more flexible to day than it ever was. A study of the most recent and also the most important undertaking of the kind, namely, the decoration by the students, of a part of the Imperial Secretariats of New Delhi is therefore very illuminating as an index to present and future prospects.

This important work was thrown open to a general competition of Indian artists by the Government of India in 1927, thereby realising the beginnings of official patronage which had been asked for by the public while the new buildings were in course of erection. When this considerable opportunity came, it did not find us altogether unprepared. The students of the School of Art had been acquiring the experience and training necessary to availing themselves of this opportunity ever since the beginning of 1920, when the then Governor of Bombay, Lord Lloyd, had assisted the writer to start the Class of Mural Painting, and had been instrumental in establishing this class on a substantial basis with eight scholarships for its students. A great many people had taken a keen interest in these new developments, and the encouragement we received from the Indian public of all shades of opinion, greatly outweighed the expressions of criticism which as time went on were not wanting in certain restricted quarters, and which were fully as severe as is generally incidental to pioneer efforts in art\* everywhere. The main principles on which the Class of Mural Painting rests, were explained by me in my article on the Indian Art Renaissance in *The Review of Nations* of October 1927. From this I extract the following —“Every student's colour is his own. But he may be taught to draw correctly, by drawing from the cast, from the head from life, and from the draped and undraped figure from life. So far we are on firm ground, and we claim that the results achieved justify us in so thinking. We might have copied the Ajanta Frescoes and gone on copying them, and shown these, and called them “Indian Art.” They would not have been Indian Art at all, any more than the copies of Botticelli, which are being manufactured in the National Gallery, are Italian Art. We do not want copying except

\* There can be no progress without criticism —Modern Movements in Art, by Frank Rutter

as an adjunct to the study of Life itself. The study of the finest antique statue or painting (whether Greek or Indian) cannot supersede the study of Nature, though it can aid study. We, the teachers, have in turn our Teacher. We turn in our doubts in the only direction whence help can reach us—we turn to Nature.

When a student can draw the human head and the human figure accurately, he has acquired something,—something which he can never lose. He has mastered the grammar of the language of Art. What message he will give the world, now that he is proficient, is his own affair. We approach Indian Art from the practical view point of artist-craftsmen. However wonderful may be the message of creative art which the young student feels surging within him—however splendid his dreams, he cannot make these materialise upon canvas or on the walls, until he has mastered the practical methods of graphic expression which belong to the artists' calling all the world over. The Buddhist painters of the Ajanta Caves were not merely mystical dreamers, but a band of energetic workers, who tackled their work with keen knowledge and complete efficiency. Everyone who has seen their work will agree that there was nothing nebulous or uncertain about these masters of line, form, and decoration. The popular class of mural painting in the Bombay School of Art indicates the fusion of inherent decorative capacities and nature study. In that—the highest class of the School of Art—the advanced students are encouraged rather than taught to apply the wonderful talent for the decoration of wall spaces, which is the unique possession of the Indian Artist."

As will be gathered from the above, all the students who participated in the work of designing and executing these decorations, had been equipped for their task with a sound knowledge of drawing. The first matter to be settled was of course the general scheme of decoration for the room in New Delhi, which had been provisionally allotted to the students to decorate, and which was finally to be entrusted to them if they could satisfy the Committee of Judges.

The room in question is known by the designation of "Committee Room A"—a prosaic enough title indeed, and yet one which, as the sequel will show, covers a veritable romance, not less genuine, surely, if far less exalted than that of mediæval Rome whose buildings inspired the best co-operative artistic efforts of the Renaissance. The apartment has a wide dome overtopping a broad cornice and narrow frieze, and beneath this

several lunettes and arched doorways Its total area of wall space is about 1,500 square feet

This interesting problem aroused the decorative instincts of the students, so that they set to work on the preliminary sketches, for a task, which in all its stages, might well be described as very considerable—with that enthusiasm, which, when called into play, is one of the strongest and most attractive features of Indian art students

Whoever may have doubted—in these doubting times in which we live—the feasibility of the co operation of many minds and hands in one artistic undertaking, would be likely to alter his views, if he could see a party of Indian students working on the decoration of a building They have a truly remarkable instinct for “dovetailing” one with another, for avoiding the obvious dangers of overlapping or spoiling the individuality of one another’s work by untimely interferences They have a natural aptitude for this kind of collaboration, for co-ordinating the work of numerous students to the extent necessary to producing unity of effect, without appreciably devitalising the figures, action, and details This is a factor to be reckoned with, considering the vast building activities in India to day

Of course a student’s design is his own, and his style is his own There are some features in most designs reproduced in this work, which from personal knowledge of each student’s capacities, I know to be unique Some of these illustrations on the other hand will seem to reveal certain eclectic influences, which again are far less noticeable in others Yet a comparison between the studies from Nature, and the reproductions of the finished panels, will indicate to the reader the really singular and extremely significant fact that a student who can draw a drapery study, an arm, or a foot, in pencil and chalk, with fine fidelity to the natural object which he has in front of him, may translate this essential data, into a truly Eastern convention, when utilising it for the decorative object he has in view An artist may adduce a world of meaning from this discovery—as I most assuredly call it For if this be true, why should we fear that the influences of Nature, or oil paints, or any influence (so it be but truth) can eliminate or obscure the national genius for decorative art? We are speaking of course of the talented student—not of the nonentity in art whose facile weakness it is to reflect every stronger influence, and who is to be found in the Art Schools of both hemispheres

But to return to the story of “Committee Room A” The students executed their sketches first in pencil—in the rough—and then proceeded to work these out in water colour During this process, a few withdrew, and

made way for others, who were selected on probation. The main body of the Class of Mural Painting consists (as has been mentioned) of the eight scholarship holders, who are promoted by merit, after a training of four years at least in the Life Classes and other classes of the School of Art. But along with these members of the old guard, march (in all comprehensive undertakings) a small crowd of new recruits, new, that is, to the more exacting tasks of mural painting. These are the scouts and patrols of the little army, and are very useful in skirmishing with the minor difficulties of decoration, while the main problems are dealt with by the experienced campaigners. In due time of course, the best recruits may be absorbed in the main body, as vacancies occur, so the selection of probationers to assist in the mural paintings, is a very important matter.

In order to discover as easily as possible, the kind of talent that is wanted, a class known as the Class of Indian Designing was established some three years ago. This class attracts junior students in the subject of pictorial composition and mural painting, who feel that they can express themselves better by certain traditional methods of their country, rather than by those eclectic styles of design which many students and artists seem to prefer—or at least adopt. The Class of Indian Designing is naturally a happy hunting ground for Indian talent in its more juvenile phases (which *may* never mature of course) and when a young student is “discovered” in this transitory region with a remarkable line, or a power for strange, eccentric combinations of flowers, birds, animals, figures, or grotesques, he is liable (to his great satisfaction) to find himself promoted. In this way we found several new men to help in the decorative scheme, some of whom turned out to be very valuable acquisitions.

## IV DECORATIVE FEATURES IN INDIAN PAINTING

THE plan of decoration, which after considerable discussion it was decided to adopt, was, to adorn the dome with eight winged figures ("Peris" or "Apsaras"),\* seven of whom were to represent some famous period of Indian Art, while the eighth would symbolise the Present. The periods selected were, the Ajanta Caves, the Ellora Caves, the period of Sanchi, (these three symbolised triumphs of Buddhist and Hindu Art), Greek and Indian Art, (the Gandhara period), the period of the Gupta Kings, the Moghul periods of Shah Jehan, and Jehangir, and Modern India.

Below each figure characteristic architecture, representative of the period, was to be painted, and a border between each of the eight periods was to convert the dome into the plan of an inverted lotus, with a "Petiole" on each petal. Beneath the cornice, a frieze of finely designed lettering and Indian Decoration was to blazon the famous lines of Keats —

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever,  
Its loveliness increases, it will never  
pass into nothingness"

This saying which was to give the key to the intention of the whole work, had been quoted by the then Governor of Bombay, Sir Leslie Wilson, in his public address to the students when presenting them with prizes on the twenty fourth of February 1928, and the words had left a strong impression.

This frieze turned out to be a very interesting experiment in the use of decorative lettering. Below it, the two largest of the lunettes were to be filled with compositions of life size figures representing "Painting" and "Drama," while the five less spacious ones were to be dedicated to "Sculpture," "Architecture," "Music," "Dancing," and "Poetry." The Spandrels between the lunettes were to be adorned with floral medallions of conventional type on a ground of Indian red. The figures, on the dome, and all the lunettes except "Drama" were to be the size of life †. A description of these paintings by the students themselves, will be found elsewhere, and will explain in their own words, the ideas of the young artists.

The result of the competition is contained in the following Note which was issued to the Press by the Director of Information, Bombay, in October

\* See Appendix B. The Apsaras or Nymphs of Heaven.

† Some small figures were also admitted in the background of one of the lunettes— Dancing.

1928 "Those who are interested in the Mural Decorations of Government Buildings at New Delhi will be interested to hear that the Government of India have accepted the recommendations made by the Advisory Committee under the Chairmanship of Sir John Marshall, and allowed the Sir J J School of Art, Bombay, to proceed with the decorations in the Secretariat Buildings in New Delhi. While approving of the Cartoons submitted by the Principal of the School, the Committee remarked that both in the sketches and the Cartoons submitted by it, the Bombay School of Art has shown a thorough appreciation of the requirements of the competition. The Committee were of opinion that the success of the final work would depend on whether the School would be able to reproduce, on a larger scale, the quality of the smaller studies, some of which, like the seated figure in "Painting"† are exquisite in line and colouring. They consider that the work of the School goes far to show that an adherence to truth in drawing, so far from diminishing the decorative value of a figure, is a definite source of strength ††

Naturally the students were elated with this successful beginning. In November 1928, they started with high hopes upon the work of executing the decorations in oils on canvas on the basis of the water-colour sketches which had been approved by the Judging Committee. In this important task they were so fortunate as to receive the kindest encouragement from time to time, from many old friends and supporters of the School. The then Governor of Bombay, who had done much to help Indian Artists, and to obtain the opportunity, for the students, of competing with others for the Delhi work, visited the School to view the progress of the undertaking, on the 15th of November. This was the last of His Excellency's frequent personal visits to the School, in which like his distinguished predecessor he had taken keen interest, before leaving India at the close of his administration, and it was an occasion of special importance. The Senior Professor of painting, Rao Bahadur Dhurandhar, when presenting the Governor with some souvenir sketches on behalf of present, and certain past students, observed that had it not been for His Excellency's personal advocacy, the Bombay artists and the School of Art would not have been able to secure the privilege of decorating buildings in New Delhi, and that the Staff and Students fully appreciated this fact, was made evident by the warmth of their farewell.

Early in the following January, the work was inspected by Their Excellencies Sir Frederick and Lady Sykes, this very encouraging event being the



first time that the new Governor of Bombay made the acquaintance of the oldest Art School of India. Another powerful friend of the students, Sir Phiroze C Sethnâ (Member of the Council of State) viewed the paintings at a more advanced stage of their progress, and as this courageous statesman had made a well remembered effort to obtain a chance for the Bombay Mural Painters, at New Delhi,\* his visit was very welcome to the workers. So too, were the visits of another friend of the Revival of Art in India, Mr M R Jayakar (Member of the Legislative Assembly), who for many years had consistently supported the efforts of the School of Art and had brought his taste and judgment into play at more than one acrimonious debate, to hold the balance fairly between Bombay's Art School and its critics. Besides these powerful friends of Art there were several others, including many Indian artists, who showed keen interest in this work, which grew with greater rapidity than might have been expected, considering the detail and elaboration which these Oriental paintings entailed in their completion, in all their phases.

The creative side of these mural paintings had of course been completed in the water-colour designs, and the problem now was to carry these out adequately. Every artist knows the difficulty of painting a picture which shall retain all the charm of the sketch, and it is not the least interesting feature of this kind of work in India, that a student will very frequently turn out a finished panel that is in all respects better than the sketch itself. Of course Mural Painting is not an art that depends for its results so much upon feeling, or *bravura* of handling, or charm of style, as does the easel picture in which the artist may secure in one day of inspiration, a result infinitely finer than he had achieved by many weeks of work. Was it not Millais who remarked that every artist had lucky flukes sometimes, but that only a fool painted them out? At any rate, whoever it was, the saying is a true one. But in Mural Painting, very few lucky flukes are possible. The art is too closely circumscribed by its specified objects, to admit of accidental passages of happy tone or elusive colour. A nicely adjusted balance of composition, a reasoned colour scale, are essential to Indian methods which depend for their effect upon the certainty of a sensitive line, and sprightly treatment of the whole arabesque, rather than upon enterprising adventures in the fascinating domain of colour. In studying the best Indian paintings—whether the magnificent mural paintings in the Ajanta Caves, or Moghul and Rajput pictures (which are also decorative in intention)—we shall find many artistic marvels to delight us (colour as well as line).

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\* Sir Phiroze Sethnâ made a powerful appeal to this effect in the Council of State in 1914—which created much interest in the idea of giving work to Indian Artists.

but not of that kind which can make artists rhapsodize over the technique of the pearls in "The Family of Darius before Alexander" by Veronese, or the vine leaves in the hair of Bacchus in Titian's "Bacchus and Ariadne"—in our own National Gallery Decoration has always been the forte of the Indian artist. Verisimilitude, pure and simple, is a more novel country to him. In decoration he is (at his best) very good indeed. His ideas and triumphs in this field have much more in common with the works of Gentile da Fabriano, Carpaccio, Fra Angelico, Benozzo Gozzoli, Paolo Ucello, and Pinturricchio, than with Massacio, Titian, or Tintoretto. No one of course dreams of suggesting a comparison of students' work with that of Masters, but it must always be borne in mind that the student is himself the means to an end, and the work of these students fore shadows the artistic potentialities of future Masters. Detail—meticulously wrought detail—is an important adjunct of the Indian Student's scheme of decoration, and therefore it is, that a sketch for a mural panel does not as a rule convey an adequate idea of an Indian artist's scheme of decoration, unless it has passed the bounds of a sketch and verges upon the Indian miniature, in its completeness. I cannot conceive of the Indian student (if left alone) possessing much sympathy with Vasari, when he describes Pinturricchio's system of adorning his mural paintings with incrustations of *stucco* as "a capital heresy in the Art" (although it is quite true that there is no gilding at Ajantâ)—because the Indian student follows a method which may often include rich elaboration of decorative detail. With him—at his best—the pattern is everything. He rejoices in tessellated pavements, ropes of pearls, extraordinary hair ornaments (just like they did fifteen centuries ago at Ajantâ!) figured fabrics, and geometrical designs.

Yet the interesting point is that, as will be seen from consulting these reproductions, the Indian student can also perceive (though it may surprise some people to know this) the advantages of empty spaces in a decorative panel. He can descry in an interval between figures or trees, not *merely* an empty space, but a piece of freehand drawing; and can make the shape of it as interesting as an arabesque.\*

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\* See the background in Dancing (page 73) as one of many examples

## V. CRAFTSMANSHIP IN INDIAN PAINTING.

It is very certain that every student of Art who studies the frescoes and paintings of the Italian Renaissance with thoroughness, must be impressed with the wonderful craftsmanship which these exhibit, in addition to their other qualities of imagination, design, or colour. This may be a truism, but the fact may well be recalled at a period when many artists in Europe seem to be more interested in problems of light and effects than with those of constructive composition. The goldsmith's shop was once, as often as not, the ante room to painting, sculpture, and architecture. The Indian fortunately yet retains the time-honoured tradition of close affiliation with the craftsman. Nearly all students start their career in the Art School with a faculty for freehand and geometrical design, this capacity is so prevalent, that I am content to class it as an instinctive, or rather hereditary talent. The "sand pictures" or "Rāngoli" drawings of Indian girls, boys and women, which are executed on the ground with the fingers only, with coloured powders—still fortunately to be seen in Bombay during the religious festivals\*—are very significant. They clearly prove the existence of talent for freehand design and pattern drawing in very young Indian children. No stencils or measurements of any kind are utilised in drawing the genuine "Rāngoli" picture, and the degeneration of this ancient art in the big cities does not alter the fact of its existence in its purer geometrical phases, for it is common all over Guzerat and Western India.

This underlying sense of the pattern (which is indisputably illustrated in the survival of the humble "Rāngoli") is a fortunate birthright. Needless to say, it is no negligible inheritance for the artist who is going to make it his object to decorate a portion of a public building. This talent is at the very base of the ancient foundation on which Indian Art has rested for thousands of years. This foundation remains uneradicated in the people themselves. The very special facility with which Indian students treat jewellery, the dexterity and knowledge with which they paint all the dainty minutiae of nose rings, necklaces, earanets, bangles, anklets, toe rings, girdles, hair and ear ornaments, head dresses, etc., is really a revelation. So too, is their knowledge of these accessories, and the certainty with which these

are drawn and painted in correct relation to the subjects proper to their use, in figures representing many different races, religions, occupations, castes and cultures. Most of these almost innumerable varieties of ornaments have names. A whole world of different draperies, and a whole history of different ways of arranging these draperies upon the person, seems to be known to the students, without anything more than an occasional discussion among themselves as to these very complicated arrangements. I have found that the young artist may sometimes make errors in his allocation of appropriate details or gestures to certain of the religious or mythological personalities whom he has to depict with his brush, but these errors which have been pointed out to me (not very often, it is true) by some learned Brahmin or Iconographer, may be matter for argument rather than of invariable rule.

Certain it is that the most brilliant European artist would be hard put to it to acquire, in the course of many years, the knowledge of Indian draperies, Indian ornaments, and Indian gestures, which is essential to the proper interpretation, in the mediums of mural painting, of India, and all that India means for the general public. The iconography of the Hindu Pantheon is in itself, the study of a life time, but quite apart from that, there is all the immense paraphernalia of the festivals, such as the Hindu weddings—a truly marvellous conglomeration of paintable details, among which the Western artist can only grope and gasp hopelessly. He might conceivably learn to draw some of the typical insignia of the heroes and heroines of the Mahabharata or the Rāmāyana, with tolerable accuracy, but the vast field of modern Indian customs, whether Mahomedan or Hindu, must always remain a *terra incognita* to the artist from Europe, however far he may explore it.\* It must be observed that these facts are always overlooked by the critics of these constructive efforts in Art Education of Bombay, who have spoken as though "Indian" Art were non-existent, simply because the *manner* of painting by many Indian artists in this city of many races, is described as Western. This "Western" manner of painting is freely adopted in Calcutta and elsewhere, in spite of the great publicity which has been given to the water colours of the Bengal School of painting, of which artists like Mr. Abanindranath Tagore and Nand Lal Bose are exemplars. But the question of the value to the world of a revival of Art in India is really a question of what

contribution in Art India has still to offer to the world *which cannot be obtained elsewhere*. Much is still essentially Indian, merely in the style of painting, but Indian artists also produce work painted in other styles and in new mediums, which however modern, is surely yet typical of India, at any rate *it can only be obtained from the brush of an Indian artist*.

The student will understand that this is no theory, but a mere statement of fact. A further point of special interest in this study of certain distinctive aspects of the craftsmanship of Indian students is their use of foliage and flowers. Flowers play a very important place in the life of the people in India to day, as they did thousands of years ago. In the ancient frescoes, the gods, the nymphs, and human beings are habitually drawn with the lotus, champak, parajâtaka, or mogra, poised daintily between their fingers and thumbs. The Moghul Princes of the Seventeenth Century chose to be handed down to posterity in their portraits, with one hand resting on the sword hilt, and the other holding some minute and fragrant blossom. The Moghuls liked to live, and desired to be buried in gardens. The lives of flowers naturally seem to symbolise the beautiful and evanescent arts of India. At the festival of *Diwâli* (the Hindu New Year) the streets of certain quarters of Bombay\* burst into annual bloom, as it were, with the paintings on the thresholds of the people. It would take the pen of a Hans Anderson to do justice to the flower like arts which flourish, only to fade, in India to day! The Young Indian Mural painter handles flowers in their decorative aspects, but does not necessarily conventionalise them. The detail from the lunette of "Music" (page 103) where the timid deer couch among a medley of flowers and a great variety of leafy details, is most sympathetically felt and very typical. In this panel many different types of flowers are represented, but these graceful accessories are handled with skilful realisation of their essentially subordinate rôle in the composition. They do not obtrude themselves. The artist has resisted the temptation to advertise his knowledge. The painting of the champak flower in Mr Ahirasi's lunette, Drama (page 75) is another interesting example.

The distortion of figures is a feature of Indian decoration which I cannot but derive from the same national quality—craftsmanship.

Distortion in Art is by no means an anomaly confined to Indian Art. It has long been practised all over the world, and in our own time is reappearing very markedly in the work of modern painters and sculptors. Such eminent "Old Masters" as El Greco and Parmigiano, freely distorted their

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\* See Appendix B Drawing the Rangoli at D wâli.

figures Do not El Greco's compositions owe much of their "flame like" quality to the curious elongation of forms and faces? In the decorations for New Delhi, the students of the School of Art have not altogether disregarded the possibilities of distortions, here and there, in their compositions In the figure of "Comedy" in the lunette entitled "Drama" (page 75) the accentuations of the hip and exaggerations of pose are very characteristic Here, in spite of continual and patient studies from the living model (and the accuracy of these may be judged from these illustrations) the painter's love of the pattern has very properly eclipsed or rather kept in their right place his useful discoveries in realism The same artist, Mr Ahivasi, shows this underlying appreciation of the values of distortion in his treatment of details in his other panel "Painting" (page 79) The figure is beautifully drawn from life itself, but there are characteristic elegancies of line in the eyes, the eye brows, the finger tips, etc., minor distortions all tending to beautify the pattern The Apsarā of the Ajanta Caves (page 89) seems to reveal her lineage by her small waist and elaborated curves I have endeavoured elsewhere to explain that the distortions we see in the Ajanta frescoes are true to a decorative principle, and may suitably quote here a passage, which though written a long time ago in the enthusiasm of one of my earliest visit to Ajantā, I have never seen any reason to modify "There has never been in any age of the World's Art of which we have any knowledge, a juxtaposition of form and drapery and ornament, more perfectly just in its essentially decorative purpose Their figures of men and women are invented and executed as rich details in a cosmic scheme, differing in degree only (but sufficiently) from the other decorative details The eyes look like jewels The hands are exquisitely patterned shapes, each ear and ringlet is a separate gem Nearly every head dress is different, and each is in itself a complete section of intricate and joyous designing' \*

All this is the tool of the goldsmith behind the brush of the painter, and this invaluable heritage of craftsmanship it is which makes the Indian Art student the factor in art which he is to day

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\* Jottings at Ajantā (*Times of India Press*)

## VI REALISM IN INDIAN PAINTING

ONE is fully conscious of the fact that in approaching the question of the capacities revealed by Indian Art students in the domains of Realism, any writer on Art in India is beginning to tread on very debatable ground, where many pitfalls yawn beneath the feet of the unwary. But without this necessary reference to the study of Nature herself, the seeker after truth would find a wide lacuna in India's case for art, and this volume would fail of its intention of giving the public the pith and marrow of personal and first hand observations.

The winged figures painted by the students of Bombay for the dome of Committee Room "A", though of conventional design, have several realistic qualities. Their pinions are not more reminiscent of the Christian type of angels than they are of the winged "Apsaras" (or "Peris") on the Temples of Benares and the Ellorâ Caves. The wings of the "Angels" in the Moghul paintings, of the carved Apsarâs of Benares, or of the kneeling Angel in the "Annunciation" (often attributed to Leonardo da Vinci) in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, are all of similar type—just as the forms of many of the Sanskrit and Hellenic stories are extraordinarily similar. The introduction of winged figures, therefore, in these decorations is no heresy—to the Indian artist at least, whatever it may be to theoretical critics. In regard to the studies from life for these figures and those in the lunettes, executed in chalk, charcoal, and pencil by the students, the reader of this volume will probably desire some explanation. Drawing from Life does not usually find a place in the copious treatises on Indian Art, and to learn that Indian students practise it as a necessary aid to study, may come as a surprise to some, and as a shock to others. It can hardly come as either the one or the other to anyone who has studied the best periods of Indian painting whether Buddhist or Moghul, where the decorative element is most thoroughly imbued with realism and truth to life throughout.

The following paragraph is accurate in its facts, and as it conveys a general idea of our methods of utilising the study of Nature, it may be given here —

"The Life Classes (18, for the students of the Bombay School), which were started at the end of 1919, have been pronounced by competent judges as well up to the level of the European Schools of Art. But proficiency in

technique forms only one side of the present system of training, for even in Europe, too much study from Life is capable of negating its own object. In India, where the decorative instinct is inherent, and where the possibilities of freehand drawing are still understood, the danger of overdoing the Life Class is even more palpable. So side by side with these realistic aids to study, and at the same period, a class of Indian Decorative Painting was inaugurated in the Bombay School of Art by the direction of the then Governor of Bombay (Sir George Lloyd). As this class specialises in mural painting, it has long been popularly known as the Class of Mural Painting. This class has executed the decorations for many public and private buildings, and painted the ceiling and panels of a specially constructed Indian Room which was exhibited at Wembley in 1924. A great deal of controversy, which has been characterised by its academic rather than its practical note, has centred round these new movements in art training in India, but the Bombay School of Art has retained the patronage and support of the public, and the increase of its students, who now number over 600 in all sections of the School, has been continuous, since it took its present line. It is significant that the wide spread revival of public interest in Art in Western India has synchronised with these activities.”\*

The poet very rightly reminds us that —

“Our little systems have their day,  
They have their day and cease to be,”

and he is a very rash man who would claim for any particular method of teaching drawing and painting, that it is *perfect*. Even Leonardo himself remained satisfied apparently with the possibilities of success within the limits of painting a light against a dark, or *vice versa*. That great man does not seem to have envisaged the potent possibilities of a light painted against a light, a question which fascinated Manet, and has intrigued his successors ever since. Holland has her Rembrandt for all time, but to day she has also Van Gogh whom the moderns delight to honour. We have our own iconoclasts in art, both painters and sculptors. “*Le roi est mort, vive le roi*” is as true of systems of art as of other systems. William Blake ardently maintained that Fuseli was a great painter, there are very few who can put up with Fuseli to day. On the other hand Blake was furious with Correggio, because he obscured the outline—as Nature does.

It will be a long time before the study from Life leads the Indian into the region in which chiaroscuro takes the place of line, long before he

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\* *Times of India Year Book 1929* page 37



substitutes masses for outline, or discards the silhouette for something else in mural painting

The silhouette however must be based upon Nature This is not a precept, but a desire on the part of the students I think they would not remain long in the School of Art if they were to be deprived of the Life Classes

The mural painters studied all the details of their paintings from the living model The drawings of feet, hands, drapery, etc., which are reproduced here, show their accuracy of drawing, and give no suggestion that these Oriental artists are wanting in a sense of rotundity of form, or light and shade But in decorating wall spaces, light and shade, or roundness, are not essential They do not bulk large in the Oriental scheme of things, and so the studies from Life (as may be seen) are utilised as a means to an end They are the data from which the student verifies his facts These facts are modified in the crucible of his imagination, and the finished panel emerges with all the details subordinated to their decorative purpose Still, *Nature is there*

After the studies from Life, come the full size cartoons which are drawn with due reference to these Let us take Mr Kowli's cartoon for "Sculpture" (page 107) This is a decorative Oriental composition, and is not impaired by its resilient line, which approximates to the forms of Nature The cartoon thus carefully constructed is to be traced off upon the canvas for the finished painting It is a means to an end only—not the end itself—and therefore several details are neglected or slightly treated, being left for solution later The main features of the original sketch of the lunette, however, have been worked out in consultation, so to speak, with Nature herself, and the general problems of proportions have been fixed by reference to the living model It is so with all these studies The students' motto has been "When in doubt go to Nature" Can this be called "Western influence?"

The theory that an Indian Art student should be able to evolve a life size figure entirely out of his inner consciousness, *because* he is an Indian, means that his art must degenerate into the repetition of conventions, as did the art of Egypt There may be good philosophy in it, but it is not a working proposition Indian students draw very well out of their heads, and they have a strong natural bias towards pictorial composition The modern artists' contempt for the subject picture, and the cherished phrase of journalistic critics—"anecdotal art"—have not yet percolated to India The "literary" element is still permissible in painting in India, and the stores of Indian legend and history furnish inexhaustible material The remark "I am weak at composition" is not very frequently heard among Indian students They

invent with unusual freedom and facility, and where the singular notion that the Indian artist is naturally imitative only—a notion which is still to be found in Europe—came from, I am at a loss to understand. No one can make the students *content* to go on copying the past conventions of their archaic periods of art, though of course they can be commissioned to do so, and can do so, when necessary, exceptionally well \*

It seems to me that it would be wilful blindness to ignore the fact that these students have in them the makings of artists. But of course they have to *live*, and without the opportunity for creative work, may well turn their hands to copying photographs or anything else, or to teaching the rudiments of school drawing. Of course, if we are to strain a point, we might describe the power of verisimilitude in portraiture as a form of “imitative” art. At any rate it is a very common experience to find that visitors to the classes of the School of Art express great surprise at the powers of painting and drawing from life, shown by the students, and it is only when they see the decorative work of the same students, that they are able to recognise the fundamental and lasting distinctions between the work of East and West. It should not be forgotten for a moment that the distinctions are there, and that they are radical and fundamental in a great many cases, and will always remain so. In the cases where these distinctions appear to be eliminated *altogether* from an individual’s capacities, I have never found that that student does quite first class work, though it may be above the average. The best work comes from those students, in whom the Oriental strain of art remains as a hidden force, pulsating through all phases of their art, and manifesting itself most strongly of course, in the creative fields, such as mural painting, or pictorial composition.

One writer at least on painting (of mid Victorian times) put forward in an authoritative form, a view, which at that time was probably not by any means unique. “With respect to the painting of the Phœnicians, Persians, Indians, and Chinese,” he wrote, “it was in the earliest ages, and has ever since been, miserable and wretched. Although the Indians and Persians have always been celebrated for their tapestry, yet, it is more for the excellence of the material, than the purity of their designs. But their utter ignorance of the naked figure, their long, barbarous, and cumbersome garments, and their want of science, are so grossly palpable, that they have never been, and never will be, referred to by any nation, as an authority in design.”

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\* See Introduction

If the above crude prophecy signifies once again the dangers which await the prophet, it may also serve as a warning to those who would still question the capacity and deny the right of Indian students to master the difficulties of drawing and painting the human figure from Life.

## VII DESCRIPTION OF THE PAINTINGS

(By the Students)†

THESE decorations were for the Imperial Delhi Secretariats, North Block, Centre part, First Floor, Committee Room "A"

The water colour sketches were started in November 1927, by the students of the Class of Mural Painting, and were finished at the end of February 1928 and submitted to the Government of India, New Delhi

The sketches were in water colours representing 8 "Apsarās" or "Peris," 7 Lunettes, 8 Spandrels, Friezes, etc. The size of the sketch of each "Peri" is 2 feet 11 inches in height, 1 foot 4½ inches breadth at the top, and 2 feet 9½ inches breadth at the bottom, i.e., a quarter of the full size on the Dome

The size of the sketches for two lunettes is 18 inches radius, and for five lunettes 12½ inches radius, i.e., a quarter of the full size, and for eight Spandrels, the size of each is also a quarter of the full size of the Dome

The Dome is divided into eight parts, and each part was decorated with winged figures symbolizing important periods in Indian Art, namely, Sânci, Gandhara, Gupta, Ajantâ, Ellorâ, Jehângir, Shah Jehân, Modern India

(1) The period of *Sânci* 250 B.C. The Peri shows the ornaments and dress worn at the time of the Sânci period, below is the *stupa*, a place of worship for the people of the Bhuddist Religion, which preached the theory of non-violence

(2) *Gandhara* period (Mixture of Greek influence with Indian Art)

(3) *Gupta* period, showing the culture of Chandra Gupta who reigned in the part of Northern India

(4) The Caves of *Ajantâ* were painted from the First Century to the middle of the sixth. Most of the caves were carved and painted by the Kings of the Chalukyan Dynasty who ruled over the whole of the Deccan with their capital city at Badami

† It should be mentioned that in addition to the Mural Painters three students of the Architectural School of the S. J. J. School of Art assisted in the difficult and trying work of placing the decorations *in situ* on the dome at New Delhi. For their co-operation I have to thank my colleague, Mr. Claude Batley A.R.I.B.A., Professor of Architecture

(5) *Ellorā* These are Bhuddist and Hindu Caves, the most beautiful and wondrous amongst them is the Kailasā Temple, the residence of the Great God Shiva. The Temple is carved out of solid black granite on a hill side, facing the west, and catches the rays of the setting sun which reach up to the Lingam, the emblem of the Great God Shiva. It is two storied and there are *Deep dānas* on both sides of the Temple on which a burning light is kept. Two life size elephants are also carved on each side (the elephants symbolising rain clouds or the God Indra who sends rain). It is perfect Shaivite architecture of the Eighth Century, carved by the Rāstrakuta Dynasty.

(6) The period of *Jehangir*, the fourth Moghul Emperor, who ruled from 1605-27, and who built Akbar's tomb at Sikandra and the Panch Mahal at Fatehpur Sikri. The architecture used is the tomb of Itmad ud daula, near Agra, built of white marble with inlaid designs, it is Indo Persian architecture.

(7) *Shah Jehān*, the fifth Moghul Emperor, the Palace Builder, who ruled from 1627-56. He built the wonderful Taj on the bank of the Jumnā River in loving memory of his beloved wife, Mumtaz Mahal. He also built Agra Fort, etc.

(8) *Modern India*. It shows the Mahratta figure draped in modern style. She wears a "*Sāree*" and "*Choli*" (or small vest) and the ornaments so often seen among the women in Western India.

The seven Lunettes, representing art, are Painting, Sculpture, Architecture, Poetry, Dancing, Music, and Drama.

There are eight Spandrels with medallions on each in the centre.

A Frieze was also painted, representing some lines from poetry "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever," etc.

All these paintings were executed in full size for the Dome of Committee Room "A" in oils on canvas, from the water-colour sketches approved by the Committee appointed by the Government of India, and the final work began from the month of November 1928, and was completed after more than nine months in August 1929.

## THE LUNETTES "DRAMA"

(LUNETTE 6 feet by 12 feet radius, page 75)

The theme of the painting is "Drama" painted in Rajput style. A figure representing "Natyā Shakti" is seated on a velvet cushioned gold throne, under the "Chatra" or canopy. She is the *dramatic power* guiding

the two phases of drama, "Hasya" and "Shoka," i.e., Comedy and Tragedy. Among the various ornaments and decorations she is decked with, are the "Kunkum"\* or saffron mark on her forehead, the scarlet line on her parted hair, the sacred black thread round her neck, and she has painted palms and feet †

On the right of the picture, (representing "Tragedy") is the "Nayal" or hero, defiant and unpersuadable, attempting to meet the heroine "Nayika" on the left side, who represents "Comedy." He is the link between the two aspects. With his sword partly drawn, he sets at naught the entreaties of the old king. The typical "Katyar" or dagger in the old man's waistband is an Indian weapon. The weeping female lying helpless is difficult to soothe in her sorrow by her "Sakhi" or companion, who sits equally helpless—both inattentive to their garments.

On the side of "Comedy" beside the heroine, standing in expectation, shy and eager, is seated the "Vidushaka", the fat clown, a Brahmin. He looks funny enough with his big disproportionate turban and whiskers, and stands in contrast to the serene "Rishi" (or ascetic) behind him.

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### " PAINTING "

(LUNETTE • 6 feet by 12 feet radius, page 79)

THE picture is painted in the Rajput style. In the centre a Rajput girl is seated on a wooden chair coloured with pigments commonly used in India, with small mirrors at the tips, and miniature parrots at the corners (forming a special feature of Indian decoration). She is posed in a simple Indian attitude, with a glass of colours in one hand and a brush in the other, she is painting on a piece of paper supported on a wooden plank like a slate, kept on her knee. Amongst the decorations of the figure are the *Kunkum* mark, the vermillion in the parting of the hair, the "Nath" or nose ring, and the bangles or "Kankanas." She has, like all Rajput girls in the old paintings, coloured her hands and feet red, and wears the usual heavy pendant in her ear, a gold flower decked with jewels, armlets, and the "Champakali" ornament on the neck (so called because of the pieces resembling the Champak flower), and "Arshi" or a ring set with a looking glass, she wears a "Choli" or vest, and has a golden veil over her † ‡

The second figure, the painter's companion, is closely looking at the album of pictures supported on a stand. She has almost all the equipments of her friend. There is a four legged stool by the artist's side on which are found a set of colours in cups, a kettle, and a "Kalamdan" or colour box of silver and enamel on a spread kerchief.

The back ground is an interior with a pair of screened windows and a doorway in the centre, decorated with a cross wise wreath of mango leaves and "Zaidu" flowers. There is the image of the god Ganpati\* at the top, and the "Swastika" and the turmeric marks on the frame.

In the corner of the foreground is a cabinet, on it are seen a "pândan"† water jug and towel. Against it stands a painting of a girl carrying water from the holy river Jumna. The inscription below means "Just as the mind of the water-carrier is in her jar," (so the artist's mind is engrossed in her picture). A pair of compasses and a "Pikdan" are below the chair, and in the other corner is a hand fan.

### "ARCHITECTURE"

(LUNETTE 4 feet 3 inches by 8 feet 6 inches radius, page 69)

This is painted in Mahomedan style. The picture shows an interior scene of a harem in a Mahomedan Palace. In the centre of the picture, a female figure is made to sit in front of a door, on a plain carpet, resting on a cylindrical pillow. She is wearing a yellow silk gown which covers the whole body, and a thin silk shawl as her upper garment. A small model of a building is kept near her. The model is of the huge building named "Gol Ghumaz," the tomb of Mahomed Adil Shah, of Bijapur. It is a plain and solid building crowned by an elegant dome about 125 feet in diameter,—the biggest in the world and famous for its wonderful whispering gallery.

In the foreground it is shown that two more figures are sitting and taking pleasure in seeing the architectural sketches. They are dressed in thin Dacca Muslin.

In the right hand corner of the picture, some papers of architectural sketches are lying about.

An incense burner is hung above, and incense is floating through the room. The whole architecture shown, is purely Mahomedan, mostly from Ibrahim Rouza, Bijapur.

\* Ganpati—the elephant headed god is the deity who is always invoked before any undertaking of importance.

† Pân-dan is a box for Pân-supari, a preparation of betel nut, cardamom and spices wrapped in a leaf of "Nag vile," pepper betel. This is given to guests as a mark of hospitality.

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## " MUSIC "

(LUNETTE : 4 feet 3 inches radius, page 71.)

THIS is a single figure composition in Moghul style, a representation of "Todi"\* Râgini. The figure is seated on a rock, by the side of a rivulet, busy with her "Kinnari Veenâ" a stringed musical instrument, having a long narrow body and a large dried calabash at either end, to concentrate the sound.

Lost in music, she has her veil partly off. She wears Pyjamâs under a Daccâ Muslin† skirt stitched with gold and silken vermilion straps in front. She wears a "Chând" (a jewelled ornament) in her loose hair, a pendant in the ear hooked in her locks by chined gold, a "Nâsuli" (twisted gold ring), "Ekavali Har" (a single threaded gold wire), and pearls in her neck, "Valayas" of plated gold on the wrists, and a "Bhuj bandha" on the right arm.

It is an open air view, a forest. The girl is surrounded by deer, birds, a peacock, and a crane. The richness of the green foliage decked with twinkling bright flowers, the rhythmic flow of the murmuring brook with dancing lotus, and the enchanted animal world, create harmony and joy—the music itself.

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## " DANCING. "

(LUNETTE . 4 feet 3 inches radius ; page 73 )

THE style is Rajput. The girl in the centre, seated on the decorated carpet, is tying on the wreath of bells (that are meant to jingle at the time of dancing to the Timing Scale). The other set of bells for the left ankle is lying in the blackwood box by her side. She is preparing to join the party of girls who are dancing on the lawn, a dance known as "Râsâ". This is a dance used since the time of Shri Krishna, who danced it with the "Gopis"‡. The steps are measured to the beats of the sticks. This form of dance used in conjunction with vocal music, is danced all over India, even to this day.

On the right, peacocks are seen joining in the dance, these symbolic creatures of dance and joy are shown in many of the Rajput paintings.

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\* 'Todi' is she whose complexion is snow white who has besmeared her body with saffron and camphor, who enchants deer in the forests, and who holds a 'Veenâ' in her hand.—'Sangita Darpana.'

† This fabric which is no longer made, had so fine a woof, that when floated upon the surface of water, it became invisible.

‡ The milk maids who were Krishna's playmates.

The evening light is glittering through the cypress trees. The foreground is a part of a verandah (of Jaipur architecture fashion) with coloured tiles in geometrical pattern, with two pillars and a marble screen. The "Tabla" and "Dagga" or instruments for measuring time, and a fan, are by the girl's side. She wears the Rajput ornaments "Sheersha Phoola" and "Karna Phoola."

### "SCULPTURE"

(LUNETTE 4 feet 3 inches radius, page 81)

THIS is entirely treated in the style of the Ajanta Caves. The dark rich Ajanta girl is seated on a decorative "Chowrang" of black Sheesum wood, and is carving out of black stone, an image of an elephant (an animal commonly seen in stone at Ajanta) with a hammer and a chisel.

The back ground consists of an open air view,—hills, with a temple on the top, seen beyond the cave architecture. Behind her is a bronze image of Ganpati, below which is the instrument box. The girl wears the head dress of the period—a 'Kamala' or lotus shaped wreath on the top knot of hair. The heavily hanging ear ornaments, (कुण्डल) in her ear, the sweeping flow of pearls, the "Kathi bandha" or wristband, the "Valayas" or plated gold bangles on the wrists, the heavy rings on the ankles, are the special attributes of the Ajanta women.

### "POETRY"

(LUNETTE 4 feet 3 inches radius, page 77)

THIS picture shows the poetic inspiration by the Muses. The girl is inspired by the Muse, and seems to be in a trance, listening to the voice which instructs her in the arrangement of her thoughts and ideas in sublime verse. She casts her eyes around on the flitting butterflies, the peacock with its brilliant plumage, the timid squirrel and the farm pigeons and rabbits, sitting around amidst the multi-coloured flowers, and composes her poem. She is ready to convey her ideas in writing to the book of palm leaves, "Grantha" by her side, with her pen, "Lekhani."

The public interest aroused by the activities of the School of Art in Bombay was in many ways a unique phenomenon. It was truly a historic landmark. For the first time in the history of Bombay a

## PART II

### I DECORATIVE INFLUENCES IN THE PAST

#### THE MOGHUL MESSAGE OF BEAUTY

NOTHING in François Bernier's famous book throws a stronger light on his character, than the passage in which he expresses his admiration for the Taj Mahal, and the naivety of this declaration of artistic faith

"I was in the company of a French merchant," he explains, "who, as well as myself, thought that this extraordinary fabric could not be sufficiently admired. I did not venture to express an opinion, fearing that my taste might have become corrupted by my long residence in the Indies, and as my companion was come recently from France, it was quite a relief to my mind to hear him say that he had seen nothing in Europe so bold and majestic"

Thus supported, Monsieur François takes heart to talk (and he talks well) about the Tâj, until near the end of the discourse another cold fit seizes him, and he adroitly postulates—"It is possible I may have imbibed an Indian taste, but I decidedly think that this monument deserves much more to be numbered among the wonders of the world, than the Pyramids of Egypt"

The clever Paris Doctor had made his point one notes, and without the possibility of giving serious offence to his fellow subjects of King Louis Bernier at the Tâj was a man under the spell of a revelation, and the truth, and nothing but the truth, was inevitably drawn from this canny foreigner. His tribute is worth reams of the facile admiration of people who have nothing to lose by praising a work that has now long been proclaimed by the general voice as "*bars concours*"

To say that the Tâj is beyond criticism, is not to say that it has no critics, and one meets people,—architects sometimes—who will explain entertainingly how (architecturally) wrong Shah Jehân was to allow the two lateral domes to nestle so close under the central canopy (like three leaves on the peepul tree), how mistaken he was in checking the minarets with black, how much better indeed, the whole would look if the minarets were away, how Itmad ud Daulah's Tomb was in better proportion, and so forth. But the Frenchman's modest statements are as epoch making as the cry of Archimedes—"Eureka I have found it." It is so much simpler to criticise than to create, and while the modern world has grasped that comforting truth and broadcasted it "not wisely but too well" the secret of the Moghul's art

\* Constable and Smith's edition of Bernier, page 199

sleeps—like Hermann Melville's *Bartleby*—"with kings and counsellors" Its like is not among us to day, no architect of this critical Age would dare to write over the lintel of his buildings the vaunt which Shah Jehân blazoned on the walls of his Hall of Audience in the fairest palace in the world,—“if there be a Heaven upon Earth, it is This, it is This”

A great commentator—Fergusson—has said, “The Taj may challenge comparison with any creation of the same sort in the whole world Its beauty may not be of the highest class, but in its class, it is unsurpassed” But we would have liked to have heard Shah Jehan's rejoinder to this It would, I am sure, have been at least as interesting as Whistler's, when that painter conveyed to the Judging Committee in Munich which had awarded him a second class medal, his complete appreciation of the second hand compliment! Again Fergusson writes (and let us not forget that he felt and wrote as one illumined by the Moghul Message of Beauty) “Though of course not to be compared with the intellectual beauty of Greek ornament, it (i.e., the decoration of inlaid precious stones) certainly stands first among the purely decorative forms of architectural design”\*

We may think with Horatio, that to reason thus, were to reason too curiously One cannot classify in the cosmos of art, the exact comparative values of those atoms of taste which carbonised the Moghul stones and marbles so that they blazed with an even greater effulgence than the Moghul diamonds Who can tread the old Palace at Delhi without feeling acutely conscious that a unique point-of view has been lost, without asking despairingly with the poet,

“Whither is fled the visionary gleam?”

Where is it now, the glory and the dream?”

It may bluntly be said that all Moghul art is decorative, and in this respect its architectural triumphs possess a consistency which even “the intellectual beauty of Greek ornament” did not always achieve In the Moghul masterpieces, a scheme of beauty is presented in which the component parts are so marvellously subordinated to the general weal, that no single item is allowed to draw the spectator away from his contemplation of the whole building I well remember how, when I first saw the Erechtheum on the Acropolis at Athens, I received one of those galvanic shocks of artistic realisation, which being so rare in the course of a life time, are to be ardently remembered But this came—I feel assured—not from my first contem-

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\* History of Indian and Eastern Architecture Volume II page 317

plation of the Erechtheum as a whole, but from the contemplation of its ornamental feature, the *Caryatides*. The magnificence of these statues of resplendent women supporting the cornice of the porch, cannot be adequately described. They must be seen, but once seen, who can think of the Temple which it is their business to uphold on their noble heads? Here at least clearly, the phonetic art of the sculptor, though part of the building, makes a greater appeal to man, than the purely technic parts of the structure, it is a war of the members in the body corporate of Beauty, and in so far as there is strife for pre-eminence in the parts, there must be unrest—even if it be a divine unrest—in the whole.

Who has not sympathised with the Judge in the first of the World's chronicled Beauty Competitions? Paris had to choose between the three goddesses,—Hera, Queen of Heaven, Athene, Queen of Wisdom, and Aphrodite, Queen of Love. What a bevy of Immortal Beauty, but how distracting! And we cannot even now affirm unanimously that he chose the right one. In the Parthenon it is easy to feel a repetition of this rivalry of two at least, of the Immortal three. Aphrodite, as we may term painting, would be there too, to-day, but she,—the loveliest, is ever a fugitive, according to the laws of Art and Love. Were the halls of Delphi acclaimed for any architectural merits that could rival in public esteem their mural paintings by Polygnotus? We should not forget moreover, that in discussing Greek decoration, we do not properly know what we *are* discussing. There are comparatively few people who remember that the Frieze\* of the Parthenon was *painted*, fewer still who like the idea. In fact the Greek decoration which we see to-day, which enshrines for us the Hellenic Ideal, is—quite apart from the fragmentariness of the legacy—*not* the Greek decoration which Pericles and Phidias spread,—gorgeous and glowing with colours before the enchanted eyes of the Athenians. The *forms* of decoration (though mutilated) are there, but where are the hues of life? And if we prefer (as many must) these pallid marbles to the lavish colours of ancient Athens, that taste is our own, but most emphatically not Hellenic.

Moghul Art on the other hand, has survived for us in its entirety, we behold it, and see that in spite of—shall we say, *because* of its very limitations—there exists no strife of Beauty in the component parts.

A man may mentally visualise (as I do) the Erechtheum as a triumphal representation of "the human from divine", he may recall the Parthenon by the vivid remembrance of those prancing horses and the grand athletes

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\* The Frieze of the Panathenaic Procession: the slabs of which are partly in the British Museum.

that ride them, the whole of ruined Olympia may be to him succinctly summarised in his reminiscence of Praxiteles' Hermes, but when one thinks of the Taj, it is the Tāj, and the Tāj only, that one remembers. These distinctions are deeper than Moghul and Greek conceptions of ornament, extend indeed to all the differences in all the ramifications of Indian and European Art. In Indian Art, there was never any controversy between the three Goddesses, for all three were united. I do not say that Paris was wrong to make a choice, or in the choice that he made, but once he did so, he separated the Fine Arts of the West for all time.

Henceforth all combinations of the three have been (though ever so well disguised) in effect a competition, and the reason that this is not perceived is, that very few people in the West have seen Indian Art in the only place in which it can be seen in its state of triple oneness, namely in India itself. Still fewer, have cared to follow up the Moghul Message of Beauty, to the laws which have made it the simplest and most happily read artistic message in the world.

It was Diogenes who taught that happiness lay in learning to do without things, and himself learned to do without his last possession, which was a drinking bowl. The Moghuls did not drive the wedge as far home as this, but it was no common genius who restricted the marble sculpture (and what sculpture!) on the walls of the Taj, to flowers and arabesques only. When one begins to reflect on what those artists *might* have put in, one can grasp the greatness of restraint which had taught the lavish East *what to leave out*—ever the acid test for the artist. There was taste, but also scientific knowledge in these and many similar omissions by the Moghuls. They saw their objective steadily, and saw it whole. They were not to be deflected from their direct march to the goal by all the wealth of Beauty that cried aloud to the Moghul artists. Shah Jehân and his sculptors saw around them on every side the decorative elephants they understood so well, the oxen with their wonderful dewlaps, the buffaloes with their curving horns. They saw in troops the exquisite women of one of the most splendid periods Art has ever known, in all the panoply of gorgeous robes, Daccâ muslins, and Kinkhâb. The Peacock Throne itself was worth (says Tavernier who saw it) over twelve million pounds.\*

Shah Jehân—Artist and Emperor—was responsive to all this, to his finger tips, and yet he passed it over. He plucked a few flowers from the garden, and these he gave to the Sculptors to transmute into marble, and to

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\*See footnote (page 473) in Constable and Smith's Edition of Bernier.

serve as models for the inlaid jewels of the shrine "A hint to the wise is sufficient" and the Indian artist of to day should not repine unduly at the difficulty of finding models

No doubt this is all far removed from the great Greek Friezes and Façades, those fighting reliefs of Amazons, Centaurs, and Demigods But all the same, I know of no art other than Moghul Art that has been able to achieve such sublime decoration by such simplicity of design The calligraphist for the great inscriptions, the lover of gardens for the floral panels—that was all! And yet nowhere does the grandeur of the conception waver a hair's breadth towards the puerile or the small This reticence was of course far removed from the barrenness of our modern buildings in India The stark white walls which we are erecting on every side, are not reticent, though they are naked, or if reticence they have, it is that of the man who we all know so well, who has acquired some reputation for gravity, simply because he has nothing to utter!

If only Shah Jehan could enter the Cawasji Jehangir Hall in Bombay, or the boundless buildings of New Delhi, would not the blank empty walls rejoice like the desert and blossom like the rose?

No—the Moghul Message has failed to percolate through to New Delhi There is a corner in Shah Jehan's Palace in the old Fort that I would advise the visitor to the new City to seek, after he has done his homage to the originality and independence of our modern builders in India! I would *strongly* advise him to hark back then to the Garden of the King! The spot I have in mind is at the Eastern end of the Diwan-i-Khas, or private Hall of Audience Here seated on a campstool by the edge of the marble bed of the "Stream of Paradise" which flowed sparkling through the centre of these apartments, with one's back to the exquisite screen beneath which the translucent waters passed on their cooling mission, one has before one the bejewelled columns and arches of the Hall Beyond and between these, glow the coppery tints of the red creeper-clad wall of the little Pearl Mosque, the domes of which can be seen showing between the distant foliage and the near angle of the Imperial Saloon Right above in front of us, the broad eaves of marble bathe the tops of the delicate arches in liquid shadows, all above and beneath is the play of blazing sunlight over the white and gilt and inlaid surfaces From the angle at which we are viewing the building, the Kiosk at the south east corner of the roof appears in a delicious perspective, its interior full of mellow shadows, its dome and finial sparkling like silver and gold against the immensity of the Indian Blue How well the Moghuls understood how to use that colour—the favoured hue which sweetens and dominates our lives—



as the all pervading back ground for the intensely characteristic Moghul pattern. It is all, you will perceive, a pattern, painted as it were, against that background of celestial blue, a picture of beautiful shapes in the first place, and these shapes filled, in their turn, with patterns of equal beauty, in gold and precious stones. It is a picture in two dimensions, the third disappears as we look at the pieces of this intricate and lovely decoration. Blue, silver, gold, and copper, against the jade greens of the garden, and the whole united by the soft tints of the sharply drawn shadows—that is Shah Jehân's colour scheme. The secret, though based upon a lowly view point, is a mighty triumph of scientific artistry. Let us reverently peep into the workings of the Moghul mind.

There is nothing fortuitous in this majestic pattern of architectural design decorated with colours, chaste and rich. Every effect has been foreseen. The designers—the men who could humbly study flowers, and loved to reproduce their leaves and tender petals in jade, jasper, onyx, carnelian, or lapis lazuli, were of course worshippers of Nature, watched her every gesture, and learned to anticipate her every mood. They made this a place apart in which she would walk with them, and so she touches the Palace walls with the illuminating points of her fingers, till they shine like burnished gold, she drapes them with the shadows of her veil, till they glimmer like a pale mirage. Everywhere the artists have *expected* Nature's co-operation, and nowhere does she disappoint them. For the only way to build in India is to build with India, such was the message—such the secret of Moghul Art. Once this perception has fully been realised, the student will begin to appreciate the basic qualities of Moghul Painting, for these differ in degree rather than in fundamentals, from the Architecture and Sculpture of the Period. We shall no longer be much disturbed by the human—one might say frankly—the “worldly” limitations often attributed to Moghul Painting, and its want of imagination of which we have heard so much. To lovers of Nature, like the Moghuls, it was natural to find in the features of the men and women around them all the æsthetic satisfaction they desired, and living in an environment that they had converted into a dream, they did not desire their artists (as a general rule) to attempt to depict one more ethereal. Probably they would think that if the Palace that has just been described, and many other beautiful buildings, were not sufficient to stimulate the artist's pencil to activity, the unseen mansions of the next world could scarcely suffice to do so,—or would it be truer to say that the splendour of the Moghul environment symbolised for them *all Beauty*, whether sacred or profane? I can imagine that genial art loving patron, Jehângir, with his Empress Nur-

Jehân, and their superb retinue, saying to the artists, "Here we are—paint us!" Remember that such pageantry was the kind of thing which the painters of that Western City "that held the gorgeous East in fee" were always endeavouring to project upon their glowing canvasses—whether it was a Veronese painting "The Marriage in Cana of Galilee", or a Tintoretto, portraying "Paradise" The themes, religious or ethereal, of the Venetians, were vehicles for the Pageant of riotous colour, of fine women and fine fabrics, of Palladian Palaces, of Knights befurred or glittering in armour, of pawing chargers and black slaves, which their imagination had delighted in, but which, magnificent though Venice was in that age, their eyes could never have seen in full Moghul opulence When Titian painted Saint Mary Magdalene, he certainly painted no saint, and Paul Veronese, or Palma Vecchio, are decidedly more convincing when they paint the all triumphant Venus in her own alluring image, than when they "camouflage" the eternal charmer under the guise of a Christian Martyr One may make a journey to Parma to prostrate oneself before Corregio's Madonnas—but it is not to Corregio's portrayal of the Virgin Mary that we bend, but to his triumphant painting of erring Humanity Let us be perfectly frank and realise how rarely it has been given to the greatest artist to paint with sincerity the superhuman, and then do justice to the honesty of the Moghuls (surrounded in actuality by the splendours which the brilliant Venetians saw only with the eye of imagination) in painting—*themselves*

But I cannot consider that for this—the Moghul Message of Beauty was wholly "of the earth, earthy" Does not the symbolism pervading the sensuous art of the period give such an idea the lie? The streams of rose water that perfumed Shah Jehan's Palaces, were as those other streams that irrigated the Paradise of Milton's sumptuous imagination when he wrote,

"How from the sapphire font the crisped brooks,  
Rolling on Orient Pearl and sands of gold,  
With mazy error under pendant shades,  
Ran Nectar"

And what is there of difference between the Elysian streams of the Grand Moghul and the Puritan Poet, except the difference between the tangible and the word image?

I am of course dealing here with art, not with ethics, and am merely concerned to show that the limitations of Moghul Art were pretty wide Moghul Painting, which comprises "the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time" cannot be understood properly if divorced from its association with Architecture and Calligraphy The eclectic influences which were absorbed

by this art need not trouble us here , and to realise its healthy, wholesome joyousness, its frank delight in all the good gifts of Providence, we must learn to know the Moghuls

Well—if one would breakfast with Akbar and sup with Shah Jehân one will hardly find them in books

“ By their works shall ye know them ”

## II DECORATIVE INFLUENCES IN THE PRESENT

### SCENES AT A HINDU WEDDING IN BOMBAY

MAY is a month of humid warmth in Bombay, when the ships for Europe are crowded. But India is not really unfair to her faithful adherents, and is quite ready to bestow compensations upon those who are willing to suffer the disabilities of her defensive climate, May is the month of exuberant colour—of tropical flowers—of the “Gold Mohur” \* and the Cassia tree. May is also *Vaishakha*, a month of Marriages, one of the four months during which the Hindus celebrate weddings, the others being *Margasirsha*, *Falgun*, and *Jyeshtha* †

The day for a Hindu wedding must be fixed by the priests who read in the Horoscopes of the bride and bride groom, the secret of the date which will be auspicious for both. In olden days this ceremony must have been even a more interesting event for the young people than it is to day, seeing that the bride was usually not more than eight or nine years old—eleven at most. The mother of one of my Indian friends was married at the age of seven, his father being then eleven years of age! After the marriage the children used to live with the family of bride or bride groom, and they played and grew up together, until the union of children merged imperceptibly into the greater bond. In those times, when the bride visited the family of her future husband to be decked and displayed in all her finery, she had to be dressed by her future mother in law. Now a days though the latter's duties are more formal, the child spirit seems still to permeate all the proceedings, as the child angels illuminate the paintings of Murillo. At the very commencement of the train of picturesque events which lead up to the wedding itself, the child is brought to the fore. It is the smallest relative of the bride groom who is sent by his family to carry their invitation to the bride a few days before the wedding. The little one is never more than six years of age—sometimes a baby who cannot yet utter words. I have seen such a messenger. He was lying on coconut matting by one of the cool open windows of the bride groom's home, one arm half concealed by rumpled curls of jet was tucked beneath his cheek, the other thrown over his head, and his pose had that abandonment and classical grace which so often fascinates one in a sleeping child. He had faithfully completed his herald's task, and now while the bride was being adorned in the women's apartments, while the ears of the expectant men folk of the family were occasionally greeted with peals of

\* Gold Mohur. — *Gold Mohur* is Flower Blossom.

† December March and April.

other wreaths In December the bridal wreath is of purest white, for the Jasmine then is the only flower available When the time comes for the wedding guests to escort the bride groom from his father's house to the home of the bride, the order of the procession is as follows —

The Marathi Band (*Chowghadā*),

The children (some walking, some in carriages),

The Indian Drums (*Tāshān allā*),

The Band,

The bride groom's father followed by the procession of men,

The bride groom, with the State Umbrella held over his head, in his carriage,

The bride groom's mother, followed by the procession of women

Behind the women, is carried the *Wādī*, a large gilt and silver emblem with artificial lights and plants on it, intended to protect them from the interference of outsiders To the music of its marching bands, the procession moves slowly down the street A ceremonious scene takes place on the arrival of the bride groom's carriage at the home of his betrothed An aunt of the bride is the first person to come down the steps (while four of the bride's nearest relatives hold a shawl above her head to protect her from the evil eye) to wave the sacred light and to make the *Kunkum* mark on the bride groom's brow For this service she is rewarded by him with a present Then the bride's youngest brother, a baby about 2 years of age, is lifted up by some of the older people (with the shawl held over him in similar fashion) and after he has made the usual sign on the bride groom's forehead, he varies the ordinary routine by twisting his ear! This quaint action is as much as to say "Take good care of my sister"—for which admonition he too is the recipient of a gift

Now comes the turn of the bride's father who places a cocoanut before the bride groom, then again another at the feet of the horses (the bride groom being still seated in the carriage) and finally walks all the equipage, after which he makes the third *Kunkum* mark on the bride groom's forehead He then offers his hand to his future son in law, and when he has alighted, escorts him, holding him by the hand, to the small Pavilion which has been erected in readiness to receive him Lastly, it is for the ladies on the bride's side to show their hospitable intentions by pushing forward to receive the bride groom's mother and her relatives and guests Their generous intentions are shown by the *Kunkum* mark which they confer upon the women who are their guests, and by the distribution of cocoanuts and sweets called

diamond nose rings, earlanets, and bracelets, and makes still ruddier the red gold at elbow joints and wrists

At last the bride groom has been fully robed, and ladies have waved the *panchârti* before him. Everyone now endeavours to follow him as he makes his way, clad in full regalia, into the house. But many are not successful. There is increasing excitement (now that the psychological moment is approaching), everyone endeavouring to move forward towards the centre of interest. Within the house, an ante room is thronged with ladies, and the drawing room almost packed to the doors with both sexes, is entered with difficulty. Just in front of the bride's father stands his daughter with her back towards him, facing with bent head, a great sheet which is held aloft, so as to screen her from her bride-groom. Everyone seems to be pressing closer around the central group, as many as can, throw rice again and again upon the couple who are on the threshold of their new world. Close to the bride, above the heads of the crowd, glitters the protecting sword. The Brahmins are chanting the sacred *Mantrâs*, everyone is smiling, and in every eye sparkles stirring interest. Exactly at the auspicious instant that has been fixed by the Astrologers, the intercepting curtain is dropped, bride and bride groom face one another at last, while from a silver gourd suspended from the golden canopy above, flowers are rained upon the wedded pair.

*Batāsas* At this important juncture, that little rift which may make even wedding music mute, may well occur, if the ladies of the bridegroom's do not receive from those on the bride's side, the full attention to which are entitled !

By the time the men at the head of the procession have begun to arrive at the house of the bride's father, it is near dusk. The garden front of the house—small as are most of the City gardens,—fills up. A four posted pavilion just commodious enough to contain a small table and a seat with a conical canopy composed of strings of *Mogra* flowers wreathed about with mango leaves, studded with tube roses, is obviously centre of interest towards which the crowd converges. The pavilion, like the house and the garden, is illuminated. There is a pressure of guests at this spot, as the bride groom takes his seat upon the dais. In front of the bride's father seats himself on the lowly *pāta*, with the priest by his side as he must now perform the ceremony of washing the feet of his future son-in-law, the priest reciting Sanskrit all the while. Although this is soon over, he does not move from his position throughout the lengthy proceedings which follow. For now the bride groom assisted by his maternal uncle has to remove his outer clothes and array himself in rich robes which have been presented to him. This is a troublesome business in the confined space of the pavilion, several turbans are tried, a particularly magnificent one of sky blue and silver being discarded, apparently because of the complicated business of adjusting it. At last he satisfies himself with a simpler head-dress of heliotrope and gold, and impeded as he is by the strings of mogra flowers which dangle from his bridal wreath over his eyes, would make but an indifferent job of this toilet, were it not for the kindly and eager hands which are assisting him. While this is going on, we ought not to miss another still more interesting scene—the long procession which is continuously moving towards the verandah of the house. The women who have followed the bride groom's carriage (and most of these have arrived by this time) do not linger in the already crowded garden, but file steadily up the steps to take their places in the saloon where the bride is waiting in readiness. The verandah embowered with a luxuriant green creeper being at no great distance on our right, we can look over the heads of the crowd and see, framed by the delicate green tendrils, the wonderful picture of the fair guests mounting the steps in a steady and endless stream against a *crêpuscule* of blue and silver. The cool half lights fall upon the wreaths and the folds of their rich *sārees*, while the warm glow of the brilliant lights within the house suffuses many a beautiful face, leaps and dances among the pearl and

diamond nose rings, ear-rings, and bracelets, and makes still ruddier the red gold at elbow joints and wrists

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## A P P E N D I C E S.

## DRAWING THE RÂNGOLI AT DIWÂLI

(THE HINDU NEW YEAR).

THERE are few more instructive sights to be seen in Bombay than that of a Hindu girl drawing a Rângoli or "Sand Picture." But how many of us who read and marvel over the old stories about the "Line of Apelles" or Giotto's famous "O," realise that at least once every year—during the Diwâli Holidays—we can see in this city certain expositions in the art of freehand drawing for a parallel to which we may search Europe in vain. People may bicker, art critics may rage over the vexed subject of Indian art (what it is, and what it is not) but once every year the Rângoli puts forth its petals in our city a gentle but convincing reminder that deeds speak louder than words. In the neighbourhood of Thakurdwâr Street and Navî Wâdi, the Rângoli drawings bloom in profusion. The best time to see them is after they are illuminated by the little lamps placed upon their centres, when their rich or vivid colours shine with true Oriental splendour.

## HOW IT IS DONE

The Rângolis are drawn by the Hindu women and girls with their fingers only, in front of the family thresholds, and the manner of their making is as follows. First you must take white marble dust and (without measurements—that is the fun of the thing!) you mark upon the ground with dots the points which your design should follow, covering an area about four feet square. Then you start to draw—with your fingers—out of your head. And when you have finished the complicated job of outlining your main pattern you begin to fill it all in with joyous brilliant tints, and you adorn your design with gorgeous borders and embellishments, rubbing in the shades and subtler variations and managing to retain that delicate thread of outline intact. That is all you have to do. It is a task that would nonplus the most skilful artists of brush and palette variety!

How is this unique art—for an art it surely is—acquired? One may see babies of three years old drawing Rângolis—according to their lights—with intelligent appreciation of the pattern and without any copy. Once the writer saw a child eighteen months old who was toying knowingly with its handful of marble dust, and but for an unwonted diffidence due to being looked upon by strangers, would most probably have indicated a line or two upon the table. The Rângoli drawings of the most accomplished of the Hindu ladies are admirable and beautiful productions.

## THE SUBJECT

The subject of the Rângoli is usually laid down in the ritual, though its manner of treatment is left to the ingenuity of the artist. The eve of the Hindu New Year which Bombay has just celebrated, was the apotheosis of the "pancharti" or five wickèd lamp. The variety and beauty of the diagrammatic forms in which the girl artists contrived to represent these lamps and the wealth of sumptuous details with which they were tricked forth were extraordinary. It would be tragic to realise that all this effort was swept away on the morning after the Festival but for one's knowledge of the almost inexhaustible repertoire of some of the artists. True, there are many in the big cities who yield to the glamour of a sophisticated age, and (tell it not in Gath) make their so called Rangolis by means of mechanical time saving devices. But these are only travesties of the ancient art, masquerading like jackdaws in peacock's plumes. Not only in certain parts of Bombay, but in Guzerat and all over India, the Rangoli still flourishes, sometimes in its most winsome forms. Long may it continue to resist the inroads of realism, whether Western or Eastern, and remain the immemorial symbol of Simplicity, Virtue, and Religion! Philosophers will find much food for reflection in the Rangolis of to day. Ethnographers may endeavour to explain them to us. Art critics may bewail their decadence and prate of "Foreign Influence." But those of us who have not yet lost the faculty of wonder, will still be content to admire.

## THE APSARĀS, OR NYMPHS OF HEAVEN

THE Apsarās or more correctly *Apsarasās* (*Ap* meaning water and *saras* to move) are, like the Western nymphs, often connected with water in the Hindu Stories. They are the most purely decorative of all the denizens of the Hindu Pantheon. A learned commentator on the *Mahābhārata*\* tells us that the Apsarās represent "consciousness," and the five locks, which they are said to have worn upon their heads, were the five senses. Dowson describes them as the Nymphs of Indra's heaven, and points out an analogy between their name, which signifies "moving in the water", and that of "Aphrodite," who sprang from the sea foam. Certainly, they share many of the traits of the Western fairies, not only by their association with fountains, springs, and rivers, but because of their occasional predilection for a mortal lover, like De la Motte Fouque's fascinating Undine and her Knight, or Sir Walter Scott's Nymph of the Fountain and the ill fated Baron of Ravenswood. Moor reminds us that the *Kinnaras* are the male dancers in Indra's heaven, and the Apsarās the dancing girls, and this idea has been sung by Sir William Jones:—

"Now while each ardent Cinnara persuades  
The soft ey'd Apsarā to break the dance,  
And leads her loth, yet with love beaming glance  
To banks of marjoram and champac shades,  
Celestial genu tow'rd their King advance,  
So called by men, in heav'n Gandharvas named"

Wilkins narrates that the Apsarās were millions in number, having been created at the Churning of the Ocean, and that they became the play-mates, but not the brides, of the gods. He quotes Dowson as to their numerous amours upon Earth, citing as an instance of these the well known story of the Apsarā, Urvasī, and Pururavas, King of Ujjain.

The ancient Indian painters of the Ajanta Caves not only coloured their sculpture and ornaments, but brought the ever fair Apsarās into the decorations of the Caves, dignified though they were by sublime delineations of Buddha.

These dancers of Paradise charm us, as they sail upon their clouds of lapis lazuli at Ajantā, with their delicate rainbow barred skirts† their

\* "Five locks it is said in the Vedas, are on the heads of the Apsaras." *Mahābhārata* Roy's Translation.

† Compare this *metif* with the flounced skirts of the dancers of Crete, (*La Civilisation Égéeuse par G. Glotz*), or the flounced skirts of our own day!

winsome coiffures and turbans, some of which might be regarded as *this* even in an Age or a Land which knows not the Apsarās ! But have not most artists mentally shared the happy lot of the famous hero Arjuna, of whom it is written, " And he beheld also the celestial gardens called *Nandana Vana*—the favourite resort of the Apsarās " ? \*

Here is a pen picture of one of the Hero's celestial visitants " And when the twilight had deepened and the moon was up that Apsarā of high hips set out for the mansion of Arjuna And in that mood, and with her crisp, soft, and long braids decked with bunches of flowers, she looked extremely beautiful With her beauty and grace, and the charm of the motions of her eye brows and of her soft accents, and her own moon like face, she seemed to tread, challenging the moon himself And her feet with fair suppressed ankles, and possessing flat soles, and straight toes of the colour of burnished copper, and marked by the wearing of ornaments furnished with rows of little bells, looked exceedingly handsome and with the upper half of her body clad in an attire of a fine texture and cloudy hues, she looked like a digit of the moon in the firmament shrouded by fleecy clouds "†

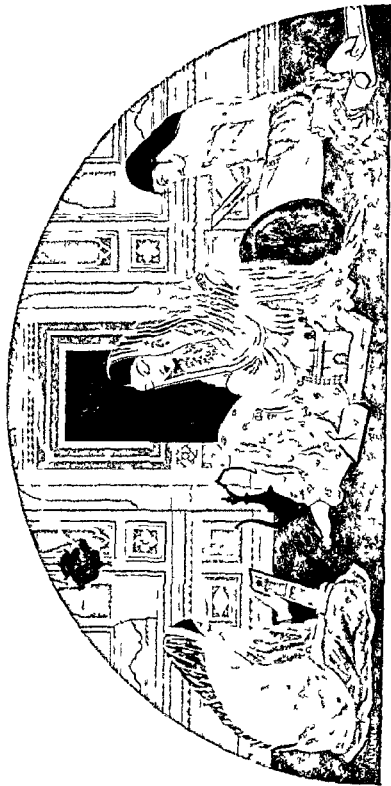
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\* Mahābhārata. Roy's Translation Vana Parva P 101

† Mahābhārata. Roy's Translation Vana Parva P 106

ILLUSTRATIONS.

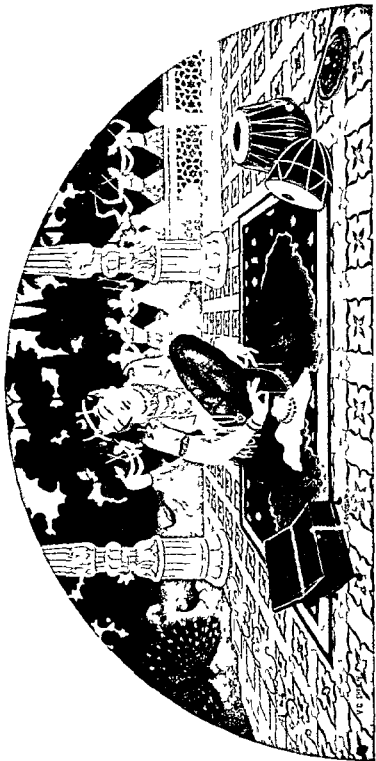






VI

R D Dileepi atker



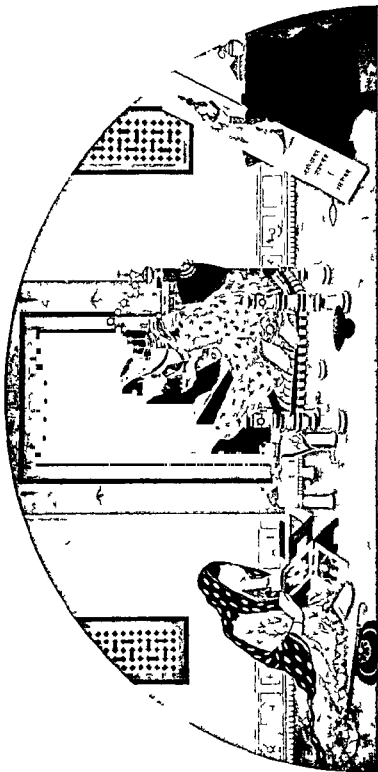
"Dancing"

V. G. Shetty



"Poetry"

D J M Coltrane.



*Painting*

*J M Abtata*



*Sculpture*



*The Gupta Period  
(Figure on Dorse.)*

*V. G. Shree*



Modern India  
(Figure on Dome)

J C Vaidya





*"Ajanta"  
(Figure on Dome)*

*G H Nagarkar  
and D G Bhadgar*



*Ellora*  
(Figure on Dome)

D. C. Bhadgar



"The Gupta Period"  
(Figure on Dome - etc.)



"Painting"  
(Lentini 4. 2. 20)



*"Dancing,"*  
(Lunette : detail.)



'Dancing'  
(Lunette detail)



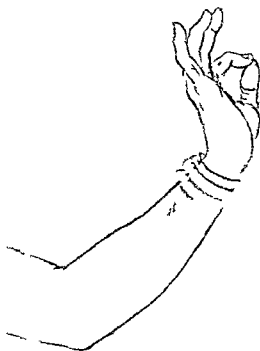
"Mure"  
(Lunette detail)

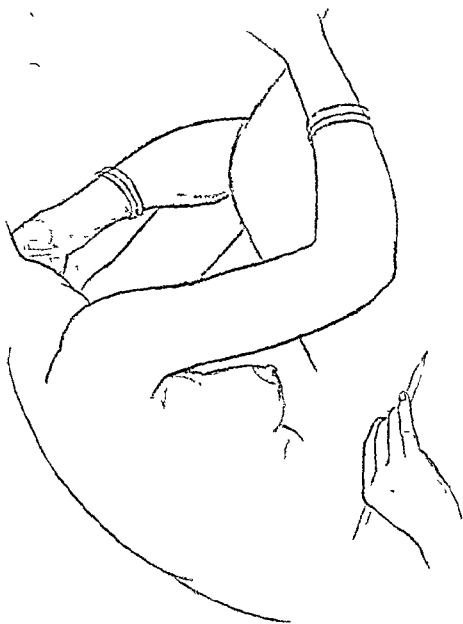


### Cartoon for Script re











*Studies of Drapery for Figure on Dome*





*Study of Drapery for Daring*



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